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ESSAYS IN SCIENTIFIC SYNTHESIS. By Eugenio Rignano.  
Translated by W. J. Greenstreet. London: George Allen and  
Unwin, Ltd.; Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Com-  
pany, 1918. Pp. 254. Price 7s. 6d. net.

The author of this book, which is translated from the French and consists of articles which have appeared in various periodicals, is the editor of *Scientia* and appears to combine in his own person the very varied learning of that journal. In fact the argument which he develops in this book is a sort of apologia for the variety of *Scientia*. It is a defence of the theorist who is not himself a specialist in any department but works out the problems which are common to and interconnect physiology and biology and psychology and sociology. The great and growing complexity of all these sciences, M. Rignano contends, makes the work of the theorist not only useful but absolutely indispensable. He cannot, it is true, claim the mastery of detail in a particular field which the specialist possesses, nor the technique, nor the intimate familiarity with a field which years of research in it give; and therefore he must not presume overmuch. But he has advantages. A specialist is becoming increasingly confined to a relatively narrow range by the growing complexity of knowledge. For example, some of the most fundamental of all questions in the interpretation of the general nature of evolution can only be solved or properly faced when account is taken of phenomena from very different sciences. M. Rignano instances particularly vitalism, which involves a consideration of the relations between physiology and morphology; the phenomena of adaptation and of the mechanism of transmission which lead in turn to the basal problems of psycho-biology and to the study of the property of "mneme." Similarly the parallel study of assimilation leads to physical questions. No one man can possibly be a specialist in all these fields. Only the theorist can succeed in embracing so extensive an area of research. His method may proceed according to M. Rignano on one or both of two main principles; (1) A kind of synthesis of the one-sided views naturally developed by specialists. The theorist is at a higher point of view from which he can combine them in a truth. That there is something in this need not be denied, but M. Rignano does not always escape the danger which lies ever in wait for this sort of thing—that of dividing the opposing views

with great sharpness so as to obtain material for the synthesis and over-simplifying them in the process. (2) The application to a new field of a method or idea or principle proved to be successful in another; in fact, generally the use of analogy. The danger here is more obvious but probably less real. Both plainly gain whatever value they possess from the comprehensiveness of the theorist's standpoint. M. Rignano attempts to explain his view by reference to the relation of the mathematician to the physicist, but this seems hardly helpful.

A series of chapters exhibiting these methods makes up the volume. They deal with very various subjects from biological evolution through physiology and psychology to sociology and socialism.

Two chapters on Historical Materialism and socialism are the most interesting for readers of this JOURNAL. M. Rignano's methods are perhaps unusually successful in the case of the first because though scientific socialism has formulated historical materialism as a basis for itself it has been desperately dogmatic, and its opponents whether through anger or fear generally stupid. M. Rignano points out very properly that the exact meaning of the theory will depend on the view taken of the supreme factor underlying economic changes on which it is argued that the others depend. Marxism has in fact varied in this way without noticing it or at least without admitting it. The chief criticism which M. Rignano brings against historical materialism is that it involves a striking contradiction. Its adherents held that economic changes take place independently while all others follow them as their reflex without causal efficacy of their own. At the same time they argued that history is the record of the struggle of class against class. The second way of putting it is according to M. Rignano in direct contradiction with the first; for it suggests that the class struggle is carried out by direct economic action and indirect political action (*e.g.*, by suitable modifications in the law of property.) Nothing, however, according to the first formulation, can possibly affect the inevitable independent course of economic change. The action of classes cannot do so. But since by hypothesis this is the object of the class struggle in the give and take of which history consists there can be no history. The defect of this criticism is that it does not pay sufficient attention to the Hegelian origin of the materialist conception of history, in the

light of which we must try to understand that blessed word 'reflex.' Marx had an affection for higher syntheses quite similar to that of any of the epigoni. The fact is that the class struggle is itself one of the results of economic change. The world-process manifests itself in the souls of men, and the changes in their ideas or policies depend on preceding or immanent economic transformations. The real difficulty in Marxism is that no attempt is made to show how this mechanism works. We are so often merely invited to have a materialism like that of Büchner and adopt it, or be condemned forever as incurably middle-class. How in a dialectic process can a single set of conditions—the economic—be regarded as more fundamental than the others, admitting that they are all actually necessary?

I do not wish to suggest that M. Rignano's discussion of the class struggle is not true and valuable. He tries to formulate as a sociological principle the idea of class struggle, paying particular attention to the "weights" of the different classes, their interplay, and the modes in which their influence may show itself. Direct economic action, he argues, is only resorted to, or should only be resorted to, when political or legal action is not possible; though he admits that it is necessary to possess great economic power before any effect is possible on political power.

The discussion of socialism in the last chapter brings together some varied types of theory. When M. Rignano distinguishes the two elements of inevitability and advisability in socialist theory, we may agree with him, without subscribing to his assumption that Marx's theory of value is primarily a doctrine of "equity." Marx, I think, was concerned only with inevitability, whatever indirect effects his idea of surplus value may have had. And I am not convinced by M. Rignano's interesting attempt to support his view by referring to the doctrine of price of production in the third volume of *Capital*. I agree that this points to a definite limitation in Marxism; but certainly it does not suggest that it is even partly an ethical doctrine. I regret that I cannot here discuss either the grounds for this judgment, or the distinction which M. Rignano draws between 'legal' and 'reformist' socialism. He is on the right lines in his endeavor to find an alternative to collectivism while recognising the social priority of property.

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